

CLASSIC BY DESIGN

IN REFRESHING HIS HOME ON GARDINERS BAY, DESIGNER MARSHALL WATSON BROUGHT A FEELING OF EASY ELEGANCE TO CLASSICALLY INSPIRED ROOMS.

BY JEAN NAYAR

Had it not been for the sale of the East Hampton home he once shared with his husband, Paul Sparks, interior designer Marshall Watson probably wouldn't now be living in the house by the sea he'd dreamed of as a child. "I'm a kid from Kansas City, where it's often said, 'We're 23 hours from the ocean,'" says Watson. "So I'd always hoped to live in a waterfront property one day." >

Marshall Watson combined Federal, Greek Revival, and shingle-style elements when designing his home in East Hampton.



While the couple's former Hamptons home—as well as their apartment in Manhattan—was significantly closer to the sea than his childhood home, neither had water views. So to lift Watson from his malaise after the sale of their house in 1999, Sparks went sleuthing around until he found an overgrown plot of land on Gardiners Bay in East Hampton. They subsequently purchased the lot with “every ounce of money we had,” recalls Watson, and in the months that followed, the diligent designer, acting as his own architect for lack of funds to hire one, drew and redrew plans for a classically inspired shingled home that

would perfectly suit their needs. Once the plans were finished, the pair mustered the financing to build it from the ground up the following year.

They lived very happily in the 2,500-square-foot, two-story home for about 17 years, until an accident led to a recent redo of its interiors. “It all started with a leak,” says Watson. Water damage over the French doors leading to the balcony of the upper-level master bedroom prompted him to replace the opening with an arched variation he’d wanted from the start. With that repair project behind him, Watson turned his attention to updating the bedroom’s interior and, given his

Wedge wood blue walls speak to the brilliant sea just beyond the dining room, reflected in the sparkling silver. ABOVE: Dark trim accentuates the room's soaring paneled cathedral ceiling, further heightened by an elegant four-poster bed.



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ABOVE: An intricately carved beechwood table sits between two large-scale blue-and-white porcelain urns. INSET: Marshall Watson's home makeover is included in his new book, *The Art of Elegance* (Rizzoli, \$55).

PHOTOGRAPHY BY LUKE WHITE (LIVING ROOM, TABLE); COURTESY OF RIZZOLI (BOOK COVER)

perfectionist inclinations, one thing led to another until he had refreshed the entire house. He finished the makeover last year, just in time to include it in *The Art of Elegance*, a book about his work, coauthored with Marc Kristal and published in March by Rizzoli.

Although many of the finishes and fabrics in the rooms are new, most of the furnishings (some of them family heirlooms) remained the same. "I don't believe in throwing anything away," says

Watson, whose cherished possessions include an antique table from his great-grandmother, a set of dining chairs from his mother, and the Venetian pendant lanterns in the master bedroom. Some of these pieces played a role in the development of his original design scheme, as Watson—a stickler for proper scale and proportion—meticulously shaped spaces around the existing furnishings to respond to the way he and Sparks live.

Laid out in a classic

Greek Revival four-square plan—with the living room as the central enfilade on the main floor, linking the library, dining room, guest room, and kitchen in the corners—the traditionally furnished rooms are at once formal and relaxed. "I had three gods to serve in the living room: the fireplace, the ocean view, and the TV, which I had to figure out where to put in order to hide it," says Watson. Three distinct groupings of furniture allowed him to finesse

this trio of focal points. And with fresh glazed wall finishes, updated wallpapers, and new curtains and upholstery throughout the home, the uplifting palette of sunny yellows, grays, and blues gracefully mediates the divide between indoors and out. "I love grabbing color from the outdoors and pulling it in," Watson adds.

At the same time, details like the delft tiles in the fireplace surround, crisp curtain trims, and high-gloss moldings lend

the entire home the easy elegance that has become Watson's hallmark. "A home needn't be fussy or pristine or untouchable to be elegant," says the designer. "To me, it's about comfort, light, proportions, harmony, and balance. I think it's important to create spaces that strive for more civility." In this day and age, many would no doubt agree. *Marshall Watson Interiors* is located at 105 W. 72nd St., NYC, 212-595-5995; marshallwatsoninteriors.com. ■